

SENIOR RESEARCH STAFF ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM

7 August 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH: Deputy Director/Intelligence

SUBJECT: Expression of Concern on the Problem of Disposing
of Nuclear Waste (Attachment: Article from
Christian Science Monitor, 5 August 1958).

The attached article from the Christian Science Monitor highlights a problem which has long struck us as being one of the most important confronting the world today: the disposal of nuclear waste. It is our impression that there is little public awareness of the existence of this problem, and the realization of it may come as a shock, even in this country. For this reason it would seem imperative to face it openly now.

It is hard to imagine a greater misfortune for the world than to discover that the bright promise of an age of abundant nuclear energy was in fact illusory. It is indeed possible that this disappointment would be more psychological than real, since in all probability the non-nuclear sources of energy available to the world, including fossil fuels, solar power and thermal energy generated by utilizing temperature differentials in the ocean, would, in fact, be sufficient to take care of the needs of an expanding world economy for centuries to come. Nevertheless, nuclear energy has become a symbol of the aspiration of underdeveloped nations, poor in conventional sources of energy. To discover that this aspiration was illusory would produce a deep and bitter disappointment, part of which might be directed against the leading nuclear powers, especially the US.

For this reason we feel that the highest priority should be given to the study of this problem. The International Atomic Energy Agency should be publicly seised of the matter and every resource should be put at its disposal. In the meantime, there should be a stern warning by the UN against present casual methods of disposing of nuclear waste. Continuation of any practices which could result in disastrous

contamination of the ocean and its forms of life would bring upon the offending parties a degree of searing hatred comparable only to that which is being engendered in large areas of the world by the testing of nuclear weapons, and which may evolve into a new and terrible concept of crime against humanity.

In this connection we should heed the words of the Mayor of Hiroshima on the thirteenth anniversary of the atomic bombing of that city: "We shall view the use of any nuclear weapons, by whatever nation for whatever purpose, as a crime against humanity." (New York Times, 7 August 1958, p. 2). An even more powerful statement of this passionate charge has been made by Sukarno, whom we are hopeful of rescuing from the clutch of Communism, (New Statesman, 28 June 1958, p. 828) and it lies dangerously close to the surface in our staunchest Oriental friend, Prime Minister Kishi. (New York Times, loc cit.).

As laymen, we have no constructive suggestions to make as to how this problem could be solved. We would suggest, however, that the question of the cost of any feasible disposal system should be weighed farsightedly from the outset in all large-scale planning for the peaceful use of nuclear energy. In our opinion the question of cost is frequently reckoned too sharply in terms of present concepts of profitability. In a country which has no alternative sources of fuel, the prospect of a relatively expensive but nonetheless practicable system of disposing of nuclear waste might be eyed much more favorably in economic planning than in, say, the US which has to consider competing types of fuel on a narrow margin of economic advantage. It does occur to us that it might be possible to set aside a seismically inactive waste area of some large desert where there are no oil reserves and no significant water table, or perhaps of Antarctica, and within that area to construct sufficiently massive concrete depositories to take care of the disposal problem on an international basis. The other alternative which seems promising, i.e. discovering industrial uses for nuclear waste, should certainly be pushed far beyond the current short-range concepts of what is economically profitable.

If, in fact, a feasible solution - no matter how expensive - is at hand, the pending UN General Assembly meeting might provide an excellent opportunity for us to unveil it dramatically and thereby to present a powerful counter to the long-range economic offensive of the Communist Bloc. If there is no known solution at present, we might take this occasion

to invite the USSR, together with the UK and two or three other principal nuclear powers, under the auspices of the IAEA, to collaborate in the search for one. If this were combined with an offer to cease nuclear testing, the effect on US prestige throughout the world would be incalculable.

The fact that a Russian scientist has presented this problem to the IGY makes it all the more imperative that the US take a prompt initiative. There appears to be reason to suspect that the Russians are, like ourselves, in something of a quandary on nuclear waste disposal, and their bringing the matter up at the IGY may be both in the nature of a "fishing" venture and a move to embarrass us. Whatever the situation may be, if we are not prepared to face the issue at the United Nations General Assembly meeting, we should at least have a prepared position for the International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy which is scheduled to begin in Geneva at the end of this month. To brush it under the rug, or to allow others to do so, in the long run can only do us harm.

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Chief, SRS/DDI

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| TRANSMITTAL SLIP | | DATE <u>August 58</u> |
| TO: Director of Central Intelligence | | |
| ROOM NO. | BUILDING | |
| <p>REMARKS:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I discussed this subject with</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 150px; height: 20px; margin: 10px auto;"></div> <p style="text-align: center;">OSI, who agrees that</p> <p style="text-align: center;">this is indeed a problem which</p> <p style="text-align: center;">requires urgent consideration.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 50px; margin: 20px auto;"></div> | | |
| FROM: Chief, SRS/DDI | | |
| ROOM NO. 304 | BUILDING 2210 E Street | |

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